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W.M. (39)

10th Conclusions.

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WAR CABINET 19 (39).

CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, S.W. 1, on Monday, September 18, 1939, at 11.30 A.M.

Present :

The Right Hon. NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN, M.P., Prime Minister (<i>in the Chair</i>).	
The Right Hon. Sir JOHN SIMON, K.C., M.P., Chancellor of the Exchequer.	The Right Hon. VISCOUNT HALIFAX, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.
Admiral of the Fleet the Right Hon. LORD CHATFIELD, Minister for Co-ordination of Defence.	The Right Hon. WINSTON S. CHURCHILL, M.P., First Lord of the Admiralty.
The Right Hon. L. HORE-BELISHA, M.P., Secretary of State for War.	The Right Hon. Sir KINGSLEY WOOD, M.P., Secretary of State for Air.
The Right Hon. Sir SAMUEL HOARE, Bt., M.P., Lord Privy Seal.	The Right Hon. LORD HANKEY, Minister without Portfolio.

The following were also present :

The Right Hon. Sir JOHN ANDERSON, M.P., Secretary of State for the Home Department and Minister of Home Security (<i>Items 1-13</i>).	The Right Hon. ANTHONY EDEN, M.P., Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs (<i>Items 1-13</i>).
The Right Hon. OLIVER STANLEY, M.P., President of the Board of Trade (<i>Item 14</i>).	The Right Hon. LESLIE BURGIN, M.P., Minister of Supply (<i>Item 14</i>).
Mr. R. H. CROSS, M.P., Minister of Economic Warfare (<i>Item 14</i>).	Sir HORACE J. WILSON, Permanent Secretary to the Treasury.
Air Chief Marshal Sir CYRIL L. N. NEWALL, Chief of the Air Staff (<i>Items 1-13</i>).	Admiral of the Fleet Sir DUDLEY POUND, First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff (<i>Items 1-13</i>).

General Sir W. EDMUND IRONSIDE,
Chief of the Imperial General Staff
(*Items 1-13*).

Secretariat.

Sir EDWARD BRIDGES.
Major-General H. L. ISMAY.
Colonel L. C. HOLLIS, R.M.
Captain A. D. NICHOLL, R.N.
Mr. F. HEMMING.
Lieutenant-Colonel E. I. C. JACOB, R.E.
Mr. A. BEVIE.
Mr. G. N. FLEMING.

WAR CABINET 19 (30).

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Operations.
(Previous
Reference:
W.M. (39) 18th
Conclusions,
Minute 1.)

1. The Secretary of State for Air said there were no particular matters to report. Recommendations of Syll had given negative information. The reports of an enemy concentration at Gluckaburg were unlikely to be true, as there was only a small landing ground there.

The Minister for Home Security said that considerable damage had been caused at Barking power station, as a result of short circuits caused by the break-away of some of the balloons of the London barrage. He enquired whether any steps could be taken to prevent balloons from breaking away when there were electrical disturbances.

The Secretary of State for Air undertook to investigate the matter.

The War Cabinet took note of the above statements.

The Naval
Situation.
(Previous
Reference:
W.M. (39) 18th
Conclusions,
Minute 2.)

2. The First Lord of the Admiralty informed the War Cabinet that His Majesty's Aircraft-carrier *Courageous* had been torpedoed 330 miles West of Land's End, at 8 p.m. the night before, and had sunk. The vessel was accompanied by an escort of four destroyers, two of which had gone off to assist a merchantman that had been attacked. It was believed that the other two destroyers had sunk the submarine which had attacked the *Courageous*.

No details were yet available of the loss of life, but it was probably considerable. The ship carried two squadrons of aircraft, and the loss was particularly serious in view of the large number of specialist personnel included in the complement of that type of vessel. The Admiralty proposed to publish the loss, as it could not be kept entirely secret.

The *Courageous* had been employed on trade protection in the Western Approaches. The *Ark Royal* was also at sea for the same purpose, and the *Hermes* was at present back in port.

A discussion then took place as to whether the operations of aircraft-carriers in the protection of trade were of sufficient value to outweigh the risk of their loss. It was pointed out that the *Ark Royal*, which had already been unsuccessfully attacked, was the only modern aircraft-carrier in the world. She was equipped with every modern device, and carried a complement of highly trained personnel. Although it was true that aircraft from the carriers had carried out a number of attacks on submarines, it should be remembered that the number of unaccompanied ships passing through the dangerous areas was falling every day, as the convoy system was gradually being put into operation.

It was generally agreed that, although it was undesirable to interfere with the discretion of the Commander-in-Chief, a message should be sent to him indicating that the view was held that in present circumstances it would be desirable to withdraw the *Ark Royal* from trade protection.

The First Lord of the Admiralty said that this occurrence had drawn attention once more to the shortage of destroyers from which we were suffering. As soon as the United States Neutrality Act had been repealed, he thought we should do everything in our power to purchase destroyers from the United States. They had a large number in their Navy, and even if we could only secure 20 of their old vessels, they would be of the greatest assistance to us.

Another method by which we could obtain some relief would be if we could use Berhagen, from which port we could operate long-range flying boats and destroyers. The French were not in a position to turn over any destroyers to us.

There had been three sinkings of merchant vessels in the previous 24 hours, and three attacks on enemy submarines, the results of which were uncertain.

He had paid a visit to the Fleet over the week-end, and had found the Commander-in-Chief confident, and a cheerful spirit prevailing.

The War Cabinet:—

- (a) took note of the above statement;
- (b) invited the First Lord of the Admiralty to send a signal to the Commander-in-Chief in the sense indicated in the discussion as to the employment of the *Ark Royal* on trade protection duties.

The Military Situation in Poland.

(Previous Reference: W.M. (39) 18th Conclusions, Minute 3.)

3. *The Chief of the Imperial General Staff* said that no definite report of the fall of Warsaw had yet been received. Fighting was still going on at a number of places in Poland.

The Russian advance into Poland seemed to have cut the line of retreat of the main body of the Polish army into Roumania. The Polish Government were believed to have escaped into Roumania.

Further reference was made to the Galician oilfields. A Summary of the discussion is recorded on the Secretary's standard file of Conclusions.

The Chief of the Imperial General Staff emphasised the serious military implications of the action taken by Russia. In this connection the *Secretary of State for War* expressed the view that the Empire was faced with a situation of grave peril, and he thought that the country should be stirred to make far greater efforts and submit to far greater sacrifices than were at present contemplated. Greater efforts were called for in the field of production, more particularly of land armaments.

The War Cabinet took note of the above statements.

The Military Situation in France.

(Previous Reference: W.M. (39) 18th Conclusions, Minute 4.)

4. *The Chief of the Imperial General Staff* said that there was nothing special to report regarding the military situation in France.

Some discussion took place in connection with the report that the Germans were constructing two batteries of 24-inch Howitzers for the bombardment of the Maginot Line. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff said that he would investigate this report and discuss the matter with the French Military Authorities.

The War Cabinet took note of this Statement.

Staff Conversations with Belgium.

(Previous Reference: W.M. (39) 16th Conclusions, Minute 13.)

5. The War Cabinet had before them a Report by the Chiefs of Staff on Staff Conversations with Belgium (W.P. (39) 32).

The Chief of the Air Staff and *the Chief of the Imperial General Staff* explained to the War Cabinet the military implications of a German advance through the Low Countries and of the action which we should need to take in order to make co-operation between ourselves and the Belgian Army effective. (A fuller account of the discussion on this point is recorded in the Secretary's Standard File of Conclusions.)

The Foreign Secretary said that he had considered further the question that a special emissary should go to Brussels, and had reached the conclusion that such an emissary would be unlikely to

make any progress. On the other hand, he thought that, if discussions on this matter were to be initiated by Sir Robert Clive, it was essential that he should first return to London to receive instructions. The Foreign Secretary also explained the stage which had been reached in our approach to the Belgian Government. His Majesty's Ambassador in Brussels had taken some tentative soundings which had not been unfavourably received. In these circumstances, the letter which it had previously been intended should be sent from The King to King Leopold had been held up in the hopes that our Ambassador might be successful in inducing the Belgians to start conversations at an early date.

In the ensuing discussion it was agreed that the time factor was all-important.

The War Cabinet agreed:—

- (a) to approve the report by the Chiefs of Staff on Staff Conversations with Belgium (W.P. (39) 32);
- (b) to take note that His Majesty's Ambassador at Brussels had made a preliminary contact with the Belgian Government, and that, consequently, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs had decided to hold up the despatch of a letter from The King to King Leopold;
- (c) that Sir Robert Clive should return to London to receive guidance as to the strategical reasons which, in our view, made it essential that there should be Staff Conversations between this country and Belgium.

Armament
Supplies to
Poland.
(Previous
Reference:
W.M. (39) 17th
Conclusions,
Minute 6 (ii).)

6. *The Chief of the Air Staff* informed the War Cabinet that the steamship *Laselle* was due at Istanbul on the 19th September with a shipment of aircraft and armaments for Poland. In view of the collapse of Polish resistance and the unlikelihood of the arms being put to good use by the Roumanians, the Chiefs of Staff took the view that it would be best to hand them over to the Turks as a bargaining counter in the negotiations for the Treaty. The steamship *Clan Menzies* and the steamship *Robur VIII* with further consignments of arms for Poland were due to sail on the 19th and 20th September respectively, and the Chiefs of Staff recommended that these ships should be allowed to sail, but that they should call at Gibraltar and Malta for orders.

A discussion ensued as to whether the armaments in the *Laselle* should be handed over unconditionally to the Turks, or whether they should be used as a bargaining counter.

The Prime Minister took the view that His Majesty's Ambassador in Ankara should be given discretion in this matter and be instructed to exploit the arrival of the *Laselle* at Istanbul to the best advantage possible.

The War Cabinet agreed:—

- (i) that His Majesty's Ambassador at Ankara should be given details of the consignment of aircraft and armaments due to arrive at Istanbul in steamship *Laselle* on the 19th September (this information should be supplied to the Foreign Office by the Air Ministry);
- (ii) that His Majesty's Ambassador should be given discretion as to how to deal with this consignment of arms, and should be at liberty, if he thought fit, to hand the arms over without waiting for the conclusion of the Treaty.

- (iii) that it should be suggested to His Majesty's Ambassador that he might indicate that these arms had originally been allocated to Poland, but were, not now to be forwarded to Poland; that there was a possibility that they might be sent to Rumania; that further consignments were on the way; but that, if it was clear that the Turkish Government meant business, His Majesty's Government would be glad that the Turkish Government should have this consignment of arms;
- (iv) that a decision as to the destination of the further armaments supplies originally destined for Poland in steamships *Robur VIII* and *Glan Menzies* should be deferred, but that these ships should sail according to schedule, calling for instructions at Gibraltar and Malta.

Part no f
Neutrality of
Eire.
(Previous
Reference:
W.M. (39) 16th
Conclusions,
Minute 4.)

7. The War Cabinet considered a Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs (W.P. (39) 34), to which was annexed a statement by the High Commissioner of Eire purporting to set out the rules which the Government of Eire intended to apply in relation to belligerent ships and aircraft in order to maintain their neutral status. The question at issue was whether we should make any immediate requests to the Government of Eire for a more helpful attitude, or whether we should acquiesce in the position which that Government desired to take up under its neutrality proposals.

In the course of discussion, *The First Lord of the Admiralty* said that the position was profoundly unsatisfactory from their point of view. In particular, they were anxious that the facilities of Berehaven should be available to the Navy.

On the other hand, it was generally agreed that it would be very undesirable that there should be an open difference between this country and Eire at the present moment. Mr. de Valera was always harking back to the subject of partition, but it was out of the question to make any concession, even by way of form, to him on this matter. The most likely way of securing his more active co-operation would be to leave it to the course of events to show that this was demanded by the interests of Eire.

It was stated that, if the Government of Eire were to continue their present policy, anti-Irish feeling in this country might well become very difficult to control.

The War Cabinet agreed:—

- (i) that the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs should continue his negotiations on the basis of the third course set out in his Memorandum, viz., acquiescence for the time being in the Government of Eire's proposals, on certain conditions;
- (ii) that, in the further message which Sir John Maffey should take to Eire from the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, it should be made clear that the present situation might rapidly become a very grave one, in which the questions at issue would be not matters of politics, but of vital concern to this country.

Soviet Invasion
of Poland.
Position under
Anglo-Polish
Treaty.
(Previous
Reference:
W.M. (39) 16th
Conclusions,
Minute 8.)

8. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs confirmed the statement made to the War Cabinet on his behalf at the previous meeting that the provisions of the Anglo-Polish Agreement would not come into operation as a result of the aggression of the Soviet Government against Poland.

The Agreement provided for action to be taken by His Majesty's Government if Poland suffered aggression from a European Power; but

there existed a Secret Protocol by which the British and Polish Governments recognised that the European Power referred to in the Agreement was Germany.

There was, therefore, no obligation on Great Britain to become involved in war with the U.S.S.R. as a result of the Soviet invasion of Poland.

The Prime Minister said that he thought it desirable that a statement should be issued to-day declaring that His Majesty's Government had learned with indignation and horror of the action taken by the Government of the U.S.S.R. in invading Polish territory, that this action neither altered in any way the position in this country in relation to Poland nor weakened the obligations which we had solemnly undertaken towards Poland. Although the Soviet aggression had added a further tragedy to the history of Poland, His Majesty's Government still retained complete confidence that, on the conclusion of the war, Poland would be restored.

Question of a
Protest to be
made in
Moscow.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs said that the Polish Ambassador had informed him that the Polish Government hoped that we should instruct our Ambassador in Moscow to protest to the Government of the U.S.S.R. against the action which they had taken. The general feeling of the War Cabinet was against this course, the view being taken that the declaration suggested by the Prime Minister should be regarded as embodying our condemnation of the action of the Soviet Government.

Later in the meeting, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs reported that he had just been informed that the French Government were extremely anxious that a formal protest should be made to Moscow, and desired that we should concert with them as to the wording to be employed.

The War Cabinet agreed:—

(a) to take note, that under the Anglo-Polish Agreement, Great Britain was not bound by the Treaty to become involved in war with the U.S.S.R. as a result of their aggression against Poland, the British and Polish Governments having agreed that that Agreement was directed exclusively against Germany:

(b) that the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs should arrange for the issue this afternoon, of a declaration condemning the action of the Soviet Government, on the lines indicated by the Prime Minister in the course of the discussion as summarised at X above, it being understood that, notwithstanding (c) below, no reference should be included in the statement to the formal protest proposed to be made in Moscow:

(c) that, if the French Government pressed their request that a formal protest should be made in Moscow, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs should be authorised to concert with them the terms of the protest, on the following lines:—

(i) that His Majesty's Government took note of the communication made by the Government of the U.S.S.R. with regard to their decision to move troops into Poland, but that they must formulate the fullest possible reserves in regard to this action, which was in plain violation of the treaties solemnly entered into by the Soviet Government:

(ii) that His Majesty's Government energetically repudiated the statement in the note handed by the Soviet Government to His Majesty's Ambassador, Moscow, that the Polish Government had ceased to exist, and that on the contrary, His Majesty's Government recognised the Polish Government as the Government of Poland:

(iii) that His Majesty's Government took note of the declaration of the Soviet Government that they proposed to pursue a policy of neutrality towards the Governments with which they had diplomatic relations.

The Position of the British Military Mission to Poland.

9. *The Chief of the Air Staff* asked that arrangements might be made to secure diplomatic protection for the members of the British Military Mission to Poland, so as to prevent them being interned in Roumania. Some of the officers concerned have been definitely attached to the staff of His Majesty's Ambassador, Warsaw, but others have not.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs undertook at once to look into this matter and to take such action as was possible.

The War Cabinet took note of the above statement.

Japanese-Soviet Relations.

10. *The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs* said that the Japanese Ambassador had called at the Foreign Office on the previous Saturday (16th September, 1939) and had given a most solemn assurance that the agreement reached between the Japanese and the Soviet Governments was strictly limited to a settlement of the local problems on the Mongolian-Manchukuo frontier, and was not to be taken as indicating any fresh orientation of Japanese policy. The Ambassador had undertaken to deliver to the Foreign Office to-day a detailed memorandum on this subject. The Secretary of State added that, while it was impossible to speak with certainty, he and his advisers were inclined to believe in the genuineness of the Ambassador's assurances.

The War Cabinet took note of the above statement.

The Far Eastern Situation.
(Previous Reference: W.M. (39) 16th Conclusions, Minute 12.)

11. *The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs* said that he was anxious to reach an agreement with the Japanese Government in regard to the position in Tientsin, and that the settlement of this question now turned upon the possibility of reaching agreement as to the disposal of the Chinese silver now held in Tientsin. A suggestion had been made that it might be possible to hand over this silver to the Japanese, provided that they agreed to employ it exclusively for the relief of Chinese distress in the flooded provinces of China, and were prepared to give adequate guarantees to this end. This suggestion had been put to His Majesty's Ambassador, Tokyo, who had replied welcoming this proposal, which he thought would be acceptable to the Japanese Government.

The War Cabinet agreed :—

That the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs should be authorised to reach an agreement with the Japanese Government on the lines indicated in his statement as summarised above, provided that he was satisfied as to the nature of the guarantees to be afforded by the Japanese Government.

The Balkans.

(Previous Reference: W.M. (39) 17th Conclusions, Minute 14.)

12. *The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs* made a statement in regard to the position in the Balkans.

The note of the discussion on this matter, and of the conclusions reached, is recorded in the Secretary's Standard File of War Cabinet Minutes.

Previous References. W.M. (88) 17th Conclusion. Minute 18.)

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs drew attention to telegram No. 465, dated the 17th September, 1939, received from His Majesty's Ambassador, Ankara, stating that he believed that it would be possible to secure the agreement of the Turkish Government to the proposed treaty, if we increased by £11 millions the credit which we proposed to give for the purchase of war material.

In the discussion which ensued, the following considerations were brought forward:—

- (i) on the one hand, it appeared from telegram No. 467, dated the 17th September, 1939, from His Majesty's Ambassador, Ankara, that the Secretary-General of the Turkish Foreign Office had stated emphatically to the French Ambassador that the Turkish Government hoped to sign a treaty with us in the next few days, and that in any case nothing would be signed by the Minister for Foreign Affairs in Moscow unless the Turkish Government had already signed their treaty with us, or did so simultaneously. This suggested that the Turkish Government were genuinely anxious to reach agreement with us;
- (ii) on the other hand, the statement at the end of paragraph 4 of telegram No. 465, referred to above, appeared to imply that, while the Turkish Government were now prepared to sign the treaty, they were only willing to do so if the financial agreement, to be signed simultaneously, provided that Turkey would not be obliged to take action under the treaty (i.e., to go to war) until she had been adequately supplied with war material. It was essential, therefore, if the treaty were now to be signed, to make sure what were the immediate obligations which Turkey was agreeing to incur;
- (iii) that, in view of the length of time covered by the present negotiations, the danger that, if they were not brought to a head, we might lose the alliance with Turkey, and even that Turkey might sign a pact with the U.S.S.R., inconsistent with their alliance with us, it was essential that every possible step should be taken at once to bring the negotiations to a successful issue, even if this course of action involved some risk.

The War Cabinet agreed:—

That the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs should address a telegram to His Majesty's Ambassador, Ankara, stating—

(a) that, while, as indicated in (ii) of the summary of the discussion given above, His Majesty's Government entertained certain apprehensions as to the extent to which the Turkish Government regarded themselves as bound to take immediate action following the signing of the proposed treaty, they attached the greatest importance, on general grounds, to securing the definite acceptance of the treaty by the Turkish Government at the earliest possible moment;

(b) that the Ambassador was accordingly authorized, as recommended in paragraph 4 of his telegram No. 465, to increase the British share of the proposed credit for raw material from \$10 millions to £21 millions (the total credit for war material, including the £4 millions offered by the French, will thus be £25 millions).

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(c) that, in the circumstances indicated above, His Majesty's Government earnestly hoped that it would now be possible for him to secure forthwith definite acceptance of the treaty by the Turkish Government.

Trade Relations
with U.S.S.R.
The Consign-
ment of Timber
from, and
Machine Tools
to, Russia.
(Previous
Reference:
W.M. (39) 16th
Conclusions,
Minute 15.)

14. The War Cabinet had before them a statement by the Minister of Supply (W.P. (G) (39) 13) setting out the very urgent need for timber on the one hand, and, on the other, the importance to the armaments industry of the machine tools and plant.

The altered situation in regard to the Soviet Union was discussed. It was pointed out that it appeared that information from Moscow indicated that the Soviet Government was putting no embargo on exports, but that it would be necessary to pay for any exports in advance by dollars in a neutral bank (see telegram No. 285 from Moscow). *The Chancellor of the Exchequer* undertook to consider this latter suggestion.

The War Cabinet agreed:—

- (i) that it was essential that no tools which could be used in the machine-tool industry (paragraph (2) 1 of W.P. (G) (39) 13) should be allowed to leave this country;
- (ii) that it was desirable to re-examine the tools referred to in paragraph (2) 2 of W.P. (G) (39) 13, and to retain any considered to be really essential;
- (iii) that any tools special to Russian requirements, referred to in paragraph (2) 3 of W.P. (G) (39) 13, should be released, together with any under (ii) above, considered to be non-essential;
- (iv) that any plant or machinery suitable for Admiralty purposes should be retained;
- (v) that it was essential to endeavour to obtain supplies of softwood in view of the acute shortage, and that Russia appeared to be the only practicable source for an immediate supply of any considerable quantity;
- (vi) that an approach should therefore be made to the Government of the Soviet Union to see whether they would be prepared to ship timber in consideration of:—
 - (a) release of any machinery or plant which was not covered by the requirements set out in (i), (ii) and (iv) above; and
 - (b) payment for the timber by dollars in advance in a neutral bank (this last point to be subject to further consideration by the Treasury);
- (vii) that a draft telegram giving instructions to Sir William Seeds should be prepared by the Treasury, Board of Trade, Ministry of Supply and Ministry of Economic Warfare, in consultation with the Foreign Office, to implement the above recommendation in (vi).

Ministerial
Statement.
(Previous
Reference:
W.M. (39) 12th
Conclusions,
Minute 8.)

15. *The Prime Minister* invited the three Service Ministers and the Home Secretary to arrange for the preparation of passages dealing with the general situation, suitable for inclusion in his speech in the House of Commons on Wednesday, 20th September. It would be convenient if these passages could reach No. 10, Downing Street, by 6 P.M. on Tuesday, 19th September.

*Richmond Terrace, S.W. 1,
September 18, 1939*